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ABSTRACT

Orthopedagogisch Centrum Michiel is a multifunctional institution in the eastern Netherlands for youth with emotional problems. The staff of the institution's residential treatment center has gradually become involved with outdoor experiential education through training programs, conferences, special projects, and supervised programs. Activities in experiential outdoor programs are incorporated in the treatment of various special populations such as adolescents with behavior disorders, drug addictions, and criminal records. The staff aims for youth self-discovery and personal growth through activities such as trekking, rock climbing and rapelling, caving, and white-water canoeing, followed by journal writing or group reflection. Some problems have been encountered with regard to effectively structuring group processes. Outward Bound was the first institution running experiential outdoor programs in the Netherlands, beginning in 1961. De Dreef, a center for the intensive treatment of adjudicated youth, uses outdoor activities to support its program. Other residential programs in the Netherlands use extensive trekking, sailing, or farming. Project philosophies and results are poorly documented in the Netherlands, but the few studies or reports that exist generally find positive results for these programs. Programs in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria are comparable to those in the Netherlands. (KS)

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# Experiential education, outdoor adventure as a modality in youth care and residential treatment. A survey of programs, principles, research and practice on the european continent, especially the Netherlands.

**Presented September 30 at the 21st annual international conference of the Association for Experiential Education, september 30 – October 3 1993 in Smugglers' Notch, Jeffersonville, Vermont U.S.A.**

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Contents


1. Personal presentation and position-finding . . . . . 3

2 Introduction . . . . . 5

3 Our start at OC Michiel . . . . . 5

3.1 How we are working now. . . . . 6

3.2 Weak points, developmental issues. . . . . 7

3.3 Conclusion . . . . . 7

4 Development in the Netherlands. . . . . 8

4.1 The diversity of programs. A selection of programs that reflects practices in the Netherlands. . . . . 8

4.2 Documentation and research. . . . . 13

5. Programs in the German speaking area . . . . . 15

6 Post Script . . . . . 16

7 Bibliograpy/references . . . . . 17

8 SUMMARY . . . . . 18

## 1. Personal presentation and position-finding

I work at the residential treatment centre OC. Michiel. This is a multifunctional regional institution for youth care in and around Nijmegen in the eastern part of the Netherlands (15.000.000 inhabitant on about 25.000 square miles).

The children we work with are basicly intellectual normally gifted and have emotional problems, sometimes due to a malfunctional family system, sometimes also due to an more inborn weakness of functions or personality.

In the residential department we are working in small scale units mostly in normal houses in town and try to provide a so called measure-maid treatment. In general we combine residential treatment of the child (27 under 13, 27 (13-19)) (including individual therapies) with intensive family therapy / guidance. We also have a school for special education for the age from 6 to 12 (60), a day treatment programm (36), an ambulant intensive familiy guidance program (16 families), a crisis reception (16) unit, parttime treatment (16) and a guided independent living program (14). The day treatment unit, two residential groups for younger children, the school and the staff unit are located in an area out of town.

For a few years we are trying to integrate outdoor experiential education in our residential program and in june 1993 a pilot study has been started to complete our crisis reception program with an adaption of the 'families first' or 'home-builders' program.

My profession is orthopedagogue. Orthopedagogics is studied at University. The word 'orthopedagogy' is composed out of three greeck words: 'orthos', 'pais' and 'agogein'. 'Orthos' means straight, or as opposed to ill, healthy, 'pais' means child and agogein means 'to bring up', so orthopedagogy is the scientific study of (interventions in) all educational situations that are not normal. My speciality is residential treatment and I'm the orthopedagogue of the elder-youth-department. In one of the groups of our institution we are operating using experiential outdoor adventure.

My connection with experiential education goes back to 1965 as I took part in a course of the Dutch Outward Bound School.

As I was studying special education at Leyden university ('69 - '74), I discovered some information about wilderness challenge programs, that interested me, but since my work with younger childeren took me in an other direction, my interest stayed on a half concious level.

As I got a job in a residential treatment for adolescents, we got in touch with OBS Holland and got some training (3 days) from them. This was in 1981/82 and led to a tour to Lapland with a group of our boys. Since we were not able to develop enough support, we didn't succeed in integrating this method in our way of working. The two main causes were the lack of how-to-do kwowledge and the lack of transfer from the action situation to the daily life. This was especially true in relation to the expectations and the high costs of such an expedition

In 1988, the section 'youth care' of the Dutch ministery for Welfare, Health and Culture started a new project on outdoor experiential learning in residential settings and when we were asked to join in, we did so.
One of the week points of experiential education in the Netherlands was (is) the lack of theoretical foundation. Knowing that, I claimed time to do some study about the subject.
Looking for the roots of experiential education, I visited the Heidelberg library (because of Hahn and Röhrs (who published about Hahn in the sixtees) and later came on track of the AEE.

I attended the 1990 St Paul conference, met several collegues and visited the libraries in Boulder (Co) and St Paul (Mn). I kept in touch by writing letters and estabished a tie to Project Adventure.

Up till now, we had Project Adventure come over twice to give some training in Adventure Based Counseling for people who want to start to work more systematicaly with experiential programs. These week-long workshops have been received with enthousiasm and at the end of this month we will have PA coming over again.

As I visited the Banff conference last year, one of the members of the board of directors asked me to start a SIG (special interest group) in international contacts. So we did and this resulted in a call for reactions in AEE Horizon. I strongly believe in international exchange, because of the synergetic force that can come from sharing different cultures and methods.

## 2 Introduction

Experiential outdoor programms have become populair in the Netherlands in the past 15 years. Programs are known as survival training and trekking expedition and are consisting of activities like: mountain climbing and rapelling, flat and white water canoeing, biking, sailing, caving, trekking and camping. The activities are used as treatment modality for a diversity of special populations such as adolescents with behavior disorders, drugs addicts, youngsters with criminal records or psychiatric problems and disabled young people in wheelchairs. Sometimes programs are done when nothing else helps, as a last 'life saver', in other situations used as catalyser or to enrich an other program. As diverse as the populations, is the diversity in programs, roots, philosophy and used methods.

## 3 Our start at OC Michiel

Because a part of our targetgroup was changing (lowering adult age in our country from 21 to 18 and more need for 7*24 hours treatment), we were in need of adapting our working method. The way of working in this particular group was individual. In the field of groupwork, experiential learning and outdoor adventure we started at a low level of experience. We acquiered the process of experiential outdoor education by doing it under supervision. The ministery of Culture Recreation and Wellfare initiated in 1988 an experiment to promote implementation in residential treatment, in which we gladly joined as we got that oppotunity. We experienced the impact of these outdoor experiences and decided for development in this direction. However, we are still in a phase of developing: we are part of an experiment, that started in

1988. We were trained 1989/1990, experimented during the next year and are now in a first phase of independent operation.

### 3.1 How we are working now.

We choose to follow the wave of the schoolyear (august – august). This means, that we take adventage of the fact that there is naturally a bigger in– and output of youngsters around the summer–holidays. Weekends and holidays offer an opportunity to programm experiences without interupting the schoolproces. For us this is an important issue since we lay worth on continuation of everyday life in community during the treatment and this includes going to school or work.

We start at the end of the summer holidays with what we could call an 'exposure phase'. This is a challenging and intensive 10 days outdoor adventure experience. Apart from developing a positive groupclimate, depending on the individual proces of the groupmember the focus is on diagnosis, self–discovery and experiencing or on experimenting with 'new' behavior. We guide this processes during different kind of outdoor activities. We like to go trekking, rock–climbing and rapelling, caving, (white water) canoeing, etcetera, because we believe in a multi–emotional (in contrast to a mono–) arousal. We take time for processing and evaluating as well during the activities, as afterwards. Selfdiscovery and aim development are promoted by the solo and keeping a personal journal. This personal journal is used for writing down personal goals and refelxtions and is also used to keep on track during the year.

Back at home in everydays life, at least one evening a week is structured spend together, to play together, to work out things from before, or to prepare new events. Sometimes special exercises of activities are executed. From time to time we spend a part of a weekend or holiday to take some more time to do activities.

Central themes are personal and interpersonal processes and the promotion of personal growth. Questions that come up are: How do I deal with ...?, how do I handel what borders me?, what am I good at?. New personal action theories are developed. Activities are thrilling or having an impact in several ways: the unknown requiers intensive attention or perseverance and emotional, cognitive, physical and will aspects are always present together. We are trying to adapt the PA and other experiential principles in our practice.

Although our experiences are still fresh, and in no way objectivily measures, we see so far a clear progress in the groupproces and some personel developments, which for us indicates we are on good track.

### 3.2 Weak points, developmental issues.

It turns out to be rather difficult to give an effective intentional structure to the activities and evaluating and processing well the experiences.

As most of us will know going out camping with a group promotes groupdevelopment. The more intensive interaction during such a period together has a pressure-cooking effect on group and relation development. A camping trip also can promote more and fasten crooked growth. So good

guidance is needed to promote a correct direction of development. And if a groupproces can not be controlled in this way a longer outdoor trip can be conta-indicated.

A not well guided evaluation doesn't offer anything but annoyance and frustration to the participants. In general the complaint is than that the atmosphere is or becomes heavy.

When processing events are not to the point, in a way that they don't realy touch the person, all experienced gain of an activity or event can quickly be extinguished. In cases this can already be noticed in the bus on the way home and sometimes you see two different persons during the trip and a few days or some weeks later back at home.

We are still in need of transferable knowledge about the processes involved and here we come to theory and research. Until recently in the Netherlands no attention has been payed to the development of a body of knowledge on this subject. The promotion of growth needs to be taken care of in the near future.

### 3.3 Conclusion

Since four years a group of OC Michiel is involved in experiential education and the use of outdoor adventure. From our experience we see and believe in effects, but we still have a lot to learn. As well on the part of hard skills, as on that of soft skills, as on that of meta skills. Both aspects will take time to develop. The hardskill part is a matter of carefull practice and learning. In the

softskill part we adapt from abroad and to develop with this knowledge a methology that fits to our culture and population.

## 4 Development in the Netherlands.

### 4.1 The diversity of programs. A selection of programs that reflects practices in the Netherlands.

The oldest institution in the Netherlands running experiental outdoor programs is Outward Boundschool. It starts in 1961 with short term 26 day residential programs in which self discovery and personality devepolment are promoted by an intensiv and strict program with fysically challenging groupmissions in the form of sport and work activities combined with verbal missions in the sense of groupevaluation, reflexion (Houtman, J.B.F. a.o.[1]). Light atlethic activities and training by seamenship, safeguarding and fireprevention on basis of reality to form the character.
In the seventies the programs are getting more flexible as well in content as in length. They get a more adventurous character and ideas of bio-energetics and Gestalt psychology are applied in processing the experience (Nuijen M.[2]).

The purpose of the outward bound school (Outward Boundschool, 1961[3]) 'prepairing for life'. '.... the program composed in such a way, that they discover themselves. That program sets them tasks that demand selfdiscipline, teamwork, feeling for adventure, hardship and justified risktaking. ..... The training scheme has from the beginning proved to be able to form the bridge between te world of their thoughts and that of the action! ...'(p. 4). In the first decade of outward bound the component of (fysical,

water) training according to a strict schedule takes a prominent place[4]. In the seventies the program focusses on the unity of body and mind and the autenticity of the participants. The program consists of adventurous activities and trust and communication excersises (Lefebvre[5]).

In the 80's there is tendendency to apply ideas psychosynthesis and confluent education, programs have a pronounced hardship part to train the will.

A former vice-president of Outward Bound started in the first half of the 80's, Elan-training, specialised in experiential outdoor and adventure education for the most vulnurable groups special (youth) populations (eg. dedicated youth, mediterranian problem groups). Elantraining runs 4-week programs and promotes experiential education in residential treament centers by providing staff training programs.

Elan-training adapts the Outward Bound ideas from the 70's in the direction an diversificated outdoor experience to discover and unfold talents and character. Although not theoretically oriented Elantraining provides an experiential learning experience in which, after a diagnosis by exposure to a trek, individual aims are set en concrete new behavior is trained in as well adventurous outdoor (group) activities (teamwork), as individual experience and problemsolving missions in the community.

The following principles (Dutch Outward Bound principles developed by Griffioen of Elan-training and Tierolf of SLO (foundation for curriculum development) (Griffioen[6].)) are stated as characteristic:

- Mobility and confrontation in unknown surroundings, experiencing basic elements and needs,
- Providing and promoting physical and psychic safety to guarantee protection and autonomy,
- equivalence and responsibility, which promotes autenticity and being open to new experiences,
- Contract and challenge (once a choice is made the plan is carried out seriously).

(Although this never has been stated as such these principles probably have been derived from Walsh and Golins since there has been avalable a copy of "the exploration of the outward bound process' at Outward Bound / Elan.

As the Belgium Outward Bound School got started in the early seventies, they were trained by the Dutch and the Belgium initiator, Luc Lefebvre, visited the United States one or more times and the information exchange is also reflected by a copy of the 'major papers presented at the conference on experiential education, Estes Park, Colorado, october 1974 given to me by the director of the Outward Bound School in 1980.)

The Belgium organisation 'Oikoten' practices, since 1982, all kind of experiential progams for (1991 25) youngsters (15 – 25) that are in conflict with the law. On the program are pelgrimages by feet to Santiago de

Compostela (in Spain), treks, workprojects, primitive travelling in unknown cultures (india, algeria). Except for the pelgrimage the programs are almost tailor made. There is no information about recidivism.

There are several residential treatment centers that are applying experiential outdoor activities for in their program, always in addition to other methods. Some examples:

De Dreef

De Dreef is an institution that provides 'very intensive treatment', the most intensiv treatment we know in the Netherlands, for adjudicated youth and youth that has been placed at decree of the gouvernment, because of the combination of crime and personality disorders. De Dreef provides projects to support and enrich the grouptreatment and learning program. Lasting projects like surfing, sailing at sea, schrimping at sea, biciclingtours, skiing or trekking in Austria provide break-through situations that explicitly are intergrated in the everyday life situation. Mesman Schulz[7] finds De Dreef most effective in treatment and result afterwards as he compares the treatment stratagies and results of three institutions of this kind.
De Dreef (Dreef[8]) provides a very intensive situation to live and associate in. De Dreef is an non-gouvernemental treatment centre for very intensive treatment of boys that are forced to get treatment by judge and penal law.
Characteristics are:

- basic safety by an empathic attitude, intimacy and a clear structure,

- ego strengthening by restricting non-perspective attitude and behaviour, looking for and appreciating the possibilities and identity and offering positive experiences,
- reality approach by a primary focus on community labour or activity to find acces to the experiential world of the youngster; talking may serve as a support to the proces of change and
- resocialisation by offering realistic and future directed possibilities.

Priciples that are employed to reach this are:
mutual acceptance, intensive basic care, a clear and surveyable structure in which almost al information is accessable, concrete activities and the situation here and now as startingpoint. To promote chances to develop and to change, live has to offer experiences and challenge. These are intensive and inevitable offered in on the institution and in outdoor activities and projects .

The Haagse Hervormde Kinderhuizen (HHK) is an other residential treatment centre that provides experiential programs. Since 1984 this institute organises 1000 miles treks in Norway. The tour is mentioned for youngsters who lost faith and confidence in themselves, adults and youth wellfare. The activity that takes 100 days by itself and is followed by intensiv counseling during 2 till 2½ month to realise agreements and an extensiv contact to keep on trail during about the following 6 month. Central elements during the trek are: hardship, callenge, thrill and adventure, nature, isolation, stimulating counselors and an evaluation team that during its visits promotes change.

The organisation claims succes with 80% of the participants[9] (more on basis of estimation, than on basis of appropriate scientific measurement).
The treks of HHK expect (Vries[10]), that by leaving everything behind, the trek creates openings to get new views on a more sensemaking future. HHK bases itselfs on the assumption one will be confronted with oneself during a fatigueing trek in a everything overwhelming nature. Surroundings from which possibilities to fly, like music, movie, disco and so on, are disappeared. There lives hardly any people and one needs one another to survive. Conflicts can't be side-stepped, they have to be fought out, as well with oneself, as with others. This all has to make one to another man, with a view on a by himself created future. Keulen (1991[4]) also indicates the maximum of inbalance that is created by the unknown area and the lack of a settled behaviour scheme, that creates the possibility to change.

The 'Centre Aurillage' provides a diversity of experiential programs for as well youngsters, as teams and residential groups. The programm is located in the south of France and makes Dutch youngsters live and work in French one family farms or family industries. The youngsters are visited for guidance and counseling two times a week and stay in the family for 13 to 26 weeks. The programs fits in the principles as mentioned by Kurth Hahn and is succesful by its unique combination of shocks (culture, language, food, prosperity, rithm of life), directness (working and using your body, thown back upon yourself without the possibility of distraction of the outside world, producing thing) and contemplation.

**Groot Emaus**

**Since 1989 Groot Emaus[11,12], an residential treatment center for mildly mental retarded adolescenty boys (Dutch WISC-R 70 - 85) with severe behavior disorders, is running a sailing project. This project with a group of boys that are diagnosed according to the DSM III as having 'conduct disorders' started because it was not well possible to maintain a situation in which guidance was possible.**

**The boys can be characterized as primairily anti-outsideworld. Basic rights and needs of other people, social norms and rules are of no importance compared to the own needs. Hectic and primitive agressive impulses can be lived out without anything that holds them back and there seem to be no feelings of guilt.**

**In order to promote the growth of mutual relation an, in the day-program integrated, shipprogram for 8 boys was introduced.**

**The used ship is a 'hagenaar', a dutch sailing frightvessel, 23 meter long, 4,5 meter wide and a depth .70 meter. The maximum of sails is 5 and the sailsurface 170 $m^2$. The ship is fit for the Dutch rivers and lakes, the Ijselmeer and the Waddensea.**

**phase one : At the start of the schoolyear: preparation for the sailing at the institution in a 10-day program aimed at the practice of sailing and the work at the vessel and during the trip.**

**phase two: a 18-day sailing tour to an island in the Waddensea, sailing around doing the shipwork.**

**phase three:14 days; daeling with the experiences and making consious what has been learned.**

The projects are stated to have a positive effect on the development of the boys. (Start of trust, more openess, more active, more responsible). One of the reasons is the realistic experience they are provided with. The cause of the effects remains vague.

In general organising camping weekends and outdoor and survival trips have become more and more populair in youth centres . Main purposes are to create adventurous leisure, to explore other behaviour, to experiment with other ways of reaching the group[13].
General youth centres are organising activities in order to get and stay in touch with the youngsters first aim is to have 'a good time' the aim of getting younsters that far that the are able to do their own leisure-management is often not met. Enjoying the outdoors is having effect and is becoming more popular since there are spectaculair projects with special populations.

So outdoor activities are used to promote teamwork/building, to learn to take and to give responsebility and to experiment with other behaviour. The effects of challenging outdoor activities meet the aim of the work of the youth centres.

### 4.2 Documentation and research.

Project philosophies, formulation of the used method, statements about the necessary skills and information about the program outlines are poorly documented in the Netherlands. Research is hardly done. In the Netherlands experiential outdoor education is up till now something of practisioners and

articles and publications reproduce the action. A framework of ideas or principles on wich actions are based is missing and accessible information is neglected.

The first public study about Outward Bound in the dutch language appears in Pedagogische Studiën in 1962 (Mulder[14]) This study gives a clear description of the method in those days, refers explicitly to the works of Hahn and about Outward Bound and gives the results of on investigation over 103 participants. For the investigation he uses participating observation and psychological tests (Lüscher (color preference), Wartegg (drawing), Rosenzweig (frustration), ABV (personality traits) and the tree drawing) at the start and at the end of the course. Although the investigation doesn't permit sound conclusions that allow generalisations, he concludes a definite tendency to a positive contribution of Outward Bound courses to the personality-development. (observed: better hard skills, better fysical functioning, more apropriate reactions, more sefconfidence and guts, more cooperation; measured: significant less neurotic reactions, more extraversy and self esteem)

In 1972 Biermans-Bresser and Biermans[15] execute an evaluationsurvey with an experimental (n=163) and a control group (n=187). The results of this studie are mentioned in the documentation of tests and testresearch in the Netherlands - 1982 (Visser, R.S.H., J.C. Vliet-Mulder, A.Evers and J. ter Laak, 1982, p. 587): Conclusion: the variables achiement motivation, habitual tendency to get in action, intern vs. extern control, social desirability, and

social fear appeared to be significantly influenced in the expected direction directly after the course; intern vs. extern control, social desirability, and social fear are stil significantly changed after 6 weeks.

The first book in dutch is written by the Belgian Lefebvre in 1977[8]. He discribes a: history, aims, ethics and methods of the Outward Bound school, b: infuences of the Outward Bound school on the development of personality of youngsters (teamwork, motivation to achieve, social development and identityformation, c: Outward Bound and leadership, d: Outward Bound Science (need for scientific investigation of personality aimed education, functions of science, aspects of programdevelopment, somatic/psychological experience in rockclimbing).

Bullens[16] reports after a visit to the U.S.A. in 1980 of a Wilderness Challenge Program of the Hollywood Boys Club that is based on the pedagogical theories of Kurt Hahn and the reality therapy of William Glasser. He describes both ideas as well as the practice of the wilderness challenge programm. The author includes in the references the book of Glasser[17] , but he doesn't mention any of the works of or about Kurt Hahn. The article is the first one on outdoor adventure therapy that is widely known in the Netherlands. This is due to its publication in Intermediair, a weekly magazine of a populair scientific character, that is freely sent to almost everyone who completed education on college level.

The author of the booklet 'in beweging kun je sturen' (Schellevis,[18]), discribes three projects of residential treatment centers, formulates their history, aims and criterions projects need to meet. Although the allience between Outward Bound and an institution in one project is mentioned, the theoretical startingpoints of Outward Bound are not elaborated.

Scholte, a.o.[19],[20] studies the 1985 trek of the Haagse Hervormde Kinderhuizen. After the trek they find a tendency to a modest attitude change and improvement, especialy more self reflexion, more sense for reality, improved self confidence, less fly behaviour, less anxiety and less need for thrill.

Publications ignore available scientific information of our own country and the authors neglect to explore, with the in our country available means, what is known about the subject. In general there seems to be a tendency of trying to reinvent the wheel.

From a scientific point of view, the Mulder and Biermans studies are more or less reliable, the others are either superficial and/or over- and understating, or just case descriptions.

## 5. Programs in the German speaking area

The development in Germany, Switzerland and Austria is comparable to that in the Netherlands, although there are some differences. In Germany the Outward Bound school or Kurzschule (short class) exists since 1951. Within Outward Bound there is no tradition with special groups. In the seventies several social therapeutic sailingprogramms are developed as an alternative for confinement for youth with behavior disorders. Several residential

treatment centers have started with small group travelprojects and sailingtrips. One of the problems in some sailingprojects in the transfer of learning. The society of the sailingship 'Thor Heyerdahl' notices lack of integrating changes in every days life[21].

The 'Jugenddorf (youth village) Rendsburg' executes since the start in 1976 about 40 experiential programs: ship projects, travel and working projects from aproximate 9 month. The projects are located all over the world: around the Mediterranian and the Baltic, in India and China, in Ireland, France and Turkey, Africa and South America, and so on. (Roeloffs, N., R. Reiter,[22]). Theoretically the projects are mainly based on the ideas of Kurt Hahn, humanistic psychology and the German 'reformpädagogik'.

In Switzerland there are several projects that combine the 'european' ideas and the more systematic approach in the USA. Hans-Peter Hufenus of 'Wildnisschule' in Mörschwil, states the necessety of a thorough training and safety practice. TREK runs programs that start in Switzerland and have a main training period of 4 month in Canadian wilderness[23]. 'Lucciola' (Italian for glowworm) runs various intensive experiential travelprograms for youth at risk in Switzerland and France[24].

In Austria the center 'Spattstrasse ARGE NOAH' (Noahs Ark) runs a program with sexualy abused girls in a severe life crisis. "Nobody bears me!" is the girls conviction. The program takes place on a highsea cutter and lasts eight month.

A department of the University of Vienna started in 1987 the study for a outdoor activity personality development program with adjudicated youth and students. This program got conceptual information from American Outward Bound specialists that worked with prisoners and from the Pecos River Learning Center. The two programms were caried out in 1989 and 1990 and consisted of a preparing meeting, a two days outdoor introduction, a 12-days outdoor course, and 3 to 4 transfer meetings inmediately after the course and after about two month. The whole project has been well documented by a publication in German by Dr. Günter Amersberg[25].

## 6 Post Script

Although it lacks in the Netherlands at the moment of a sound theoretical framework to develop the method, the first investigations on the subject show more empirical and fundamental information than we imagined in an earlier phase (the mentioned works from the 60's were so to say rediscovered in de past few years).

For the period 1993-1994 two larger projects will be conducted in the area of theoretical and methodological development of experiential education.

The Noordelijke Hogeschool, a college in Friesland, intends to write a book on training for experential education for college students.

The NIZW, Dutch institute for care and welfare that has the function to prepare the implementation of new methods in welfare in the Netherlands, will write a handbook on experiential education.

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## 8 SUMMARY

In this paper a short view is given on the development of experiential education and outdoor adventure in youth care and residential treatment in the Netherlands and some surrounding countries in general. More specific the development on the center OC Michiel is elaborated. The author gives an overview over the development of the subject in the Netherlands and some german speaking countries with respect to as well existing programs as available research on the subject. The paper is provided a list of relevant mainly Dutch and German literature on the subject.